

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAR ES 01648 221520Z
ACTION SS-25

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O R 221200Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4758
INFO AMCONSUL CAPETOWN
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T DAR ES SALAAM 1648

STADIS////////////////////////////////

EXDIS

CAPETOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR, RH, UK
SUBJECT: RHODESIA: OWEN'S PREFLIMINARY THOUGHTS ON NEXT STEPS

REF: LONDON 6371

1. SUMMARY. IN MY VIEW FROM HERE, SOME OF THE JUDGMENTS, PRINCIPLES, AND CONCLUSIONS PUT FORTH BY BUK FOREIGN SECRETARY OWEN IN REFTEL ARE DISQUIETING, E.G., HIS ASSESSMENT OF HOW MUCH SUPPORT HIS APPROACH ALREADY HAS, HIS RELATIVELY SLIGHT ATTENTION TO A ROLE FOR THE FRONT LINE PRESIDENTS, HIS VIEWS OF JUST WHAT THE US ROLE SHOULD BE, AND HIS POSSIBLE GLOSSING OVER OF THE PROBLEM OF WHAT TO DO WITH SMITH. END SUMMARY.

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2. IT IS DIFFICULT FROM THIS SPECIAL AND REMOTE PLACE TO COMMENT ON FOREIGN SECRETARY OWEN'S VIEWS ON RHODESIA AS DESCRIBED REFTEL WITHOUT RISKING GETTING INTO THE NAIVE OR THE IRRELEVANT. IT IS PROBABLY A SAFE ASSUMPTION ALSO THAT PROBLEMS SEEN FROM HERE HAVE ALREADY BEEN FULLY WEIGHED IN WASHINGTON, YET I FIND OWEN'S REPORT SOMEWHAT DISQUIETING ON THREE MAJOR COUNTS AND WOULD LIKE TO OFFER SOME COMMENT ON THESE FOR WHATEVER IT MAY

BE WORTH.

3. FIRST, I'M NOT SURE THAT SOME OF OWEN'S JUDGMENTS GIVEN IN REFTEL ARE SOUND. BASED ON WHAT WE KNOW OF OWEN'S LONDON MEETING WITH NKOMO AND HIS SESSION HERE WITH MUGABE, I THINK TO SAY HE HAS "SERIOUS COMMITMENTS FROM ALL PARTIES" MAY BE AN EXAGGERATION. TO EXPECT THAT A PROCESS OF CONSULTATION ON THORNY CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES WITH NOTHING WRITTEN DOWN WILL BUILD TRUST AND MAKE MORE MANAGEABLE TOUGH POLITICAL DECISIONS AT THE TOP SEEMS TO ME TO BE OVERLY OPTIMISTIC. TO SAY THAT THE FRONT LINE PRESIDENTS ARE "VERY POSITIVE" AND THAT HE EXPECTS AN IMMEDIATE "GO-AHEAD SIGNAL" FROM LUANDA ON AN APPROACH, AN ESSENTIAL PART OF WHICH IS US COSPONSORSHIP AND FULL PARTICIPATION IN A CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE, STRIKES ME AS UNREALISTIC. TO CLAIM CREDIT FOR CONVINCING AFRICAN LEADERS "THAT AMERICA IS NOT THE OLD AMERICA" IGNORES THE FACT THAT WE HAVE ALREADY DONE A FAIR JOB OF THAT OURSELVES AND THAT ANY FURTHER WORK ALONG THOSE LINES IS MORE LIKELY TO BE DONE BY THE ALREADY CONVERTED AFRICANS THAN BY THE BRITISH.

4. SECOND, ON PRINCIPLES, ONE WONDERS IF OWEN HAS CONVERTED BRITISH CABINET APPROVAL OF THE INITIATIVE "ONLY ON THE BASIS OF CLOSE US COOPERATION", A CONCEPT OF WHICH ALL PARTIES SEEM TO APPROVE, INTO US COSPONSORSHIP OF AND FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE CONFERENCE ITSELF, AN IDEA WHICH HAS IMPORTANT AFRICAN DISSENTERS. EVEN APART FROM THESE DISSENTERS, IT SEEMS TO ME IT LEAVES US IN A RATHER ARTIFICIAL POSITION DOING A JOB FOR WHICH WE HAVE HAD NO EXPERIENCE, I.E., HELPING WRITE A PARLIAMENTARY-TYPE CONSTITUTION FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S COLONY. FURTHER, OWEN'S CONCERN ABOUT A TRIP
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BY THE VICE PRESIDENT SEEMS TO SUBORDINATE SUCH A TRIP COMPLETELY TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE IDEA AND TO AIM AT LIMITING US FLEXIBILITY. AND THERE IS NO SIGN THAT OWEN HAS COME TO GRIPS WITH THE PROBLEM OF SMITH: WILL SMITH HAVE A ROLE IN THE TRANSITION OR NOT? MORE IMPORTANTLY, THIS IS LIKELY TO DETERMINE AFRICAN COOPERATION.

5. THIRD, ON MECHANICS, OWEN'S DESCRIPTION OF CONSULTATIONS SEEMS TO LEAVE LESS ROOM THAN MIGHT BE DESIRABLE OR A FURTHER ROLE FOR THE FRONT LINE PRESIDENTS, THE ONLY ONES WHO IN FACT HAVE POWER OVER THE NATIONALIST GROUPS, ESPECIALLY THE FIGHTING ONES, AND ALSO THE GROUP WHICH HAS SHOWN THE GREATEST (HOWEVER SMALL) UNITY AND CONSISTENCY OF PURPOSE TO DATE. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A BRITISH LIAISON MISSION IN SALISBURY WOULD MAKE GOOD SENSE AS THE FIRST STEP IN A TRANSFER OF POWER, AND IT OBVIOUSLY WOULD BE IMPORTANT TO HAVE AN OBJECTIVE US REPORTER ON THE SPOT IF THE SITUATION SHOULD BEGIN TO MOVE. HOWEVER, THE FRAMEWORK WOULD NECESSARILY BE HIGHLY COLONIAL AND OUR MAN SHOULD PROBABLY STAY VERY CLEAR OF THE CONSTITUTION-WRITING PROCESS. BY THE TIME A

COMMONWEALTH FORCE (DIDN'T OWEN SAY PUBLICLY THERE WOULD BE NO BRITISH TROOPS USED?) IS ON THE GROUND SUPERVISING A TRANSITION PERIOD, THE CRUCIAL DECISION-PERIOD SHOULD BE OVER AND AMERICAN LOGISTICAL SUPPORT (WHILE IT MIGHT BE USEFUL FOR LOGISTICAL REASONS) WOULD HARDLY SEEM LIKELY TO CONVINCE EITHER WHITES OR BLACKS TO DO OR NOT DO SOMETHING THEY WOULD OTHERWISE INTEND.

6. N.B. NONE OF THE ABOVE IS TO SUGGEST THAT THE US SHOULD NOT THROW ITS FULL WEIGHT INTO ANOTHER EFFORT AT A RHODESIAN SETTLEMENT. IT SHOULD. NEITHER CAN I THINK OF A MORE PROMISING APPROACH AT THE PRESENT THAN THAT OF A CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE. WE SHOULD PURSUE IT. AND, IF DOMESTIC BRITISH REQUIREMENTS MAKE THE KIND OF US ROLE OWEN ENVISAGES AN INESCAPABLE CONCOMITTANT OF THESE TWO JUDGMENTS, I SUPPOSE WE SHOULD TAKE OUR CHANCES. HOWEVER, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE APPROACH MIGHT HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF SUCCESS IF WE WERE LESS FORMALLY AND OPENLY INVOLVED THAN OWEN SUGGESTS. ALSO, IF THIS
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PARTICSLAR EFFORT SHOULD FAIL, WE WOULD THEN CATCH LESS OF THE FALL-OUT.
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Message Attributes

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